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NEGRO EDUCATION IN THE SOUTH

By DR. WALTER B. HILL, Chancellor of the University of Georgia

Why "in the South"? Why is the problem of negro education a Southern problem? Obviously because the negro is in the South. But why is he here? Why is it that nearly forty years after emancipation, with free right of egress, nine-tenths of the negroes are still found in the states in which they were once slaves and not in the states whose initiative made them free? Why is it that these eight millions of people who love to "travel on the cars" have not made the cheap and easy journey across the line? Why has there been no exodus, if there was near by a Canaan with no sea or wilderness between? The answer to this question, according to our local interpretation, is that the negro is in the South by his own choice; because he is better treated here than elsewhere; because his most important right—the right to make a living—is more completely secured. If these things were not true, it seems to us that there would be a Northern educational conference discussing at Philadelphia or Chicago the problem of negro education in the North or West.

The Confederate Negro.—Recently a group of Confederate veterans were recounting stories of the war. One of them told of a faithful body servant who had accompanied him to the field. The negro was captured by the Federal scouts and was given a place as cook for the colonel of a Federal regiment, with salary attached. He ran away from this cosy berth and returned to his master—bringing with him a sack of supplies and a box of the colonel's Havana cigars, on the plea that as he had been working for the colonel and the true owner had received no wages, something was due. Then another veteran in the group told a story. It was of a day of fierce battle, of an officer shot to pieces while leading his regiment in a desperate charge—the word passed back the line—and then a negro darting forward into the very crest of the battle and in the leaden hail of bullets bearing back the body of his wounded master, and afterwards nursing him into life. When these stories had been rehearsed with that fullness of detail which

was characteristic of the art of story-telling as practiced by the Southern gentleman of the olden time, one of the group, as if seized by a sudden inspiration, said: "Gentlemen, if I live to get to the Confederate Reunion at New Orleans next month, I am going to propose a monument. It is to be of black marble and to be erected in honor of the "Confederate nigger."

The object of this allusion has been to enable me to say that the duty of the South to negro education, whatever we may find that duty to be, is a duty to the children and grandchildren of the Confederate negro; and this phrase ought to include not only the faithful body-servant in war, but the old black mammy and the Uncle Remus who were objects of so much affection in every Southern household; and indeed all the negroes in the South who cared for and protected the wives and children of the soldiers at the front and who—strangest anomaly in history—fed by their labor the armies that were fighting against their freedom.

In September, 1902, a meeting of the county school superintendents of education in Georgia was held at Athens. It was the first of the series of similar conferences arranged by Dr. Buttrick. A place on the program was given to the subject of negro education, and Superintendent Gwaltney, of Rome, was appointed to lead the discussion. In the course of his opening remarks he said: "I shall begin by assuming that we are all lovers of the negro." As I heard his words, I could not avoid thinking how profoundly true they were, how naturally and cordially the superintendents accepted this definition of their attitude towards the subject; and at the same time I realized how these identical words, if they had fallen from the lips of a stranger, assuming the rôle of missionary, lecturer, or guardian, would have been liable to instant and hostile misinterpretation.

Another remark at the meeting which arrested attention was that of Superintendent Polhill, of Worth County, who, in speaking of the work at Tuskegee, said: "Booker Washington knows more about this matter than all of us put together."

The Tutelage of Slavery.—The beginning of the education of the negro was the tutelage of slavery. The South does not deny the abuses of slavery and she rejoices in the great conclusion that property in man is forever overthrown; but she contemplates with some complacency the fact that the tuition of slavery developed the

negro in a century and a half from the condition of the savage to a status where, in the judgment of those hostile to slavery, the negro was fitted for the privileges of American citizenship. No free civilized race ever made equal progress in emergence from barbarism in so short a time. The education of slavery was not in books, nor were books needed at the beginning. It was an education and discipline in labor and in practical ethics; in the virtues of order, fidelity, temperance and obedience. Religious instruction was not neglected. There was recently published a letter of a young Methodist minister in South Carolina who afterwards became a bishop of his church. The letter was written about 1840 and throws a side-light on the state of opinion at the time. He referred to the fact that he had recently received an appointment to labor among the negroes and expressed his sense of being honored by it, saying: "I have observed that only those who are well thought of by the bishop and the brethren receive appointments among the negroes." Slavery was the first chapter, the longest, and up to the present time the most fruitful chapter, in the history of negro education.

Reconstruction Blunders.—The second chapter began shortly after emancipation and includes the blunders of the reconstruction period. The reaction against the past was natural. Luther said that "the human mind was like a drunken peasant on horseback—if you put him up on one side he will fall off on the other." As the teaching of books had been denied to the negro in slavery, so now it was assumed that the only education needed was to supply this omission and accordingly an effort was made in schools and colleges to insert into the mind of the negro race, as by a surgical operation, the culture for which the Anglo-Saxon race had been preparing through long centuries of growth. The results appeared to be disappointing to those who looked on the experiment with friendly eyes; and appeared in critical eyes in many instances grotesque. As the education of the negro under slavery had principally been the discipline of work, so now it was assumed that his training in industry would abide with him and that he needed no pedagogy in that direction. The result of this error was to create a body of opinion in the South that education so-called was spoiling the negro as a laborer and not fitting him for anything else. Both the mistakes above mentioned abounded until it was seen that the need of the negro race was not so much a reversal of that education

which began under slavery as a system that would supplement and develop it. Time forbids the definition and description of the new thought in education; but it is embodied in Hampton and Tuskegee as concrete examples. They are the pioneers blazing out the path and pointing the way. Their education is both academic and industrial, with the emphasis strongly on the latter, in view of present conditions and needs.

Finally the Southern Educational Conference and the Southern Education Board came into life by the natural and unstudied law of growth, and their unique mission has been to bring the problem of education at the South, including, of course, the education both of the whites and negroes, into the national consciousness in a rational form.

Nowhere has the wisdom of this movement been better exemplified than in the characteristic thought that while the problem affects the nation, it chiefly concerns and must be chiefly worked out by the people who are at closest range. If those of other sections wonder that we in the South hesitate to apply educational principles that seem truisms elsewhere, they may profitably remember that we are in immediate contact with the painful and depressing elements of the problem which do not meet their vision—vast shiftlessness, vice and crime. Despite all this, we will not be pessimists; we cannot quite be optimists, but we are left the healthy-minded and hopeful resource of being meliorists, with faith in God and in the improvability of all His creatures.

The Problem Remanded to the South.—The nation has in fact remanded the solution of the negro problem, including, of course, the problem of education, to the South. There were days when the Southern section of our country was threatened with Force bills and similar legislation. In those days our people feared that they would have cause to say to the Government, in the words of Grattan: "You have sown your laws like dragons' teeth and they have sprung up armed men." Happily, the danger was averted, but while it was threatening there were utterances in the South which might be gathered up from press, pulpit and platform literally by the millions, in which it was said that if the North would only let the South alone, the South would solve the problem in wisdom and in justice. These utterances were sincere and their fulfillment involves not only a plain duty, but also involves the strong point of the South, the

point of honor. The attitude of the people of the North at this juncture cannot be reasonably interpreted as a desertion of the negro; it is due, as Mr. Cleveland said, to a growing confidence in the sincerity and good faith of the "respectable white people of the South." There are some to be found who say, or at least imply, that the South cannot afford to do full justice to the negro in the matter of education. They affect to fear that the result of such a policy will be to bring the negro into dangerous competition with the white race. There is no surer way in which a member of that race can exhibit his unworthiness of the blood in his veins than to entertain an apprehension that the negro can so overcome racial characteristics and the advantage of a start of at least two thousand years as to endanger the supremacy of that race. In contradiction of the apprehension referred to, I would say that the only thing which the South cannot afford in its relation to the negro race, is injustice.

All history teaches that injustice injures and deteriorates the individual or nation that practices it, while on the other hand, it develops patience—the nerve of the soul—tenacity and strength in the man or the people upon whom it is inflicted. There is nothing new in this doctrine. Plato said: "Better is the case of him who suffers injustice than the case of him who does it." In "The Republic" he rises to this climax: "Injustice makes a man or a society the enemy of all just men and above all of the gods, whose friends are the just alone." This is a magnificent statement of the existence of a moral order in the world. No member of the white race who shares its instinct of self-preservation should be willing, even on selfish considerations, to see the moral order which rules in the world driven to take the part of the other race. This and this alone would endanger the supremacy of the white race. This will not happen: for the South is ready to bring to this problem not only a spirit of justice, but of tenderness. I do not mean ideal justice, for this would be impossible, all at once, between races that had lately sustained the relation of master and slave; but I mean such approximation to justice as is possible for sincere and good men under the limitations of the case. In claiming an element even of tenderness in the spirit of the South, I am aware that this is not easily understood by those of other sections who have dealt only with "casual servants, querulous, sensitive, and lodged for a day in

a sphere they resent"; but there is a tenderness born of old Southern traditions drawn in with mother's milk, a feeling which survived the unspeakable indignities of reconstruction, and will outlive the irritations of the present and future.

What the South Has Done.—The next proposition to be affirmed is that the South has done much for the education of the negro and will take no backward step in this direction. The high authority of the United States commissioner of education is cited in support of the fact that since 1870 the South has disbursed for negro education \$109,000,000 (Report of 1899-1900, Vol. 2, p. 2501). For every dollar contributed by the philanthropy of the North for this purpose, the South, out of her poverty, has contributed four dollars. It cannot be truthfully claimed that all the people of the Southern states are pleased with this situation. It must be frankly admitted that a very considerable number, though a minority, are restive under it. It can be asserted, however, that the leaders of thought among the people are the friends of negro education. This statement is sustained by a recent symposium in which the views of prominent Southern men were expressed. There have been some suggestions to limit the funds for negro education to the taxes raised from the property of the negroes. This suggestion I learn has been put forward in North Carolina, but has been overwhelmed with confusion. It commanded more support in Florida, but has been defeated. I recently received a letter from a leading public man in Georgia, one of the strongest members of the present general assembly, in which he said: "If you should attend the educational meeting in Richmond and the question of this legislation should be broached, you can safely say to the conference that this particular bill" (to limit the funds for negro education to the taxes raised from that race) "will never become a law."

To say that the South will take no backward step in this matter is to say that negro education will share in all the increase of public taxation from the rapidly developing wealth of the section. The policy of separate schools will, of course, be maintained; and it is gratifying that this is not only the settled purpose of the whites, but that the intelligent negroes are coming to see that any blending of the races would be between the higher types of their people and the lower types of the white race, and that co-education of the races or any other intermingling is not to be desired from the point of

view of the best interests of the negro race. A significant utterance was made at a recent state convention of county superintendents of education, in Macon, Ga., on April 14, 1903. The speaker was one of the ablest and most highly esteemed judges of the superior courts of the state. He advocated compulsory education, upon the ground that the doctrine of public education logically required this measure for its completion. He realized that the sensitive point in the discussion was the relation of the question to the negro.

By way of anticipating possible objections, he delicately intimated that doubtless in the actual execution of the law, white officials would be more zealous to enforce it among the whites than among the blacks, but he added that this policy could not be depended on to affect the case to any large extent, because the negroes are making more efforts than the whites for the education of their children. He referred to sections where illiteracy among the negroes was decreasing and where illiteracy among the whites was increasing. After considering the question in its various lights, the speaker boldly declared that in spite of all objections that might be raised on the score of the negro, he favored compulsory education.

Agricultural Education.—Negro education must be specialized to meet actual conditions. It must be adapted to meet industrial and agricultural needs. This does not mean that the three R's are not to be taught in the schools. The negro citizen needs primary education for the purposes described by Thomas Jefferson in his statement on this subject, which may be regarded as classic and final. Recently the largest and most successful farmer in Georgia, one who started thirty years ago without capital and has made himself a millionaire, who now works more than a thousand hands upon his place, and certainly knows as much as any one else on the subject of the negro laborer, was speaking about the kind of negro laborers who were the most valuable. He said emphatically: "I want a hand in the field to whom I can send a written inquiry or direction as to his work and who can return to me in writing an intelligent response." The common school education is not, therefore, to be supplanted; unquestionably it should be supplemented for the great masses of the negroes, with manual and agricultural training.

As far back as 1871, General Armstrong, a veritable seer, realized this truth in its application to the negro people. His words have recently been quoted by his worthy successor as still express-

ing the method and aim of the schools of 1902. He said: "The temporary salvation of the colored race for some time to come is to be won out of the ground." Mrs. Doubleday, in her plea for nature study, estimates that 85 per cent of those engaged in gainful occupations in the South are engaged in agriculture. If I knew any method of making these statistics sensational, I would adopt it in order to emphasize the tremendous and pathetic significance of the situation—four-fifths of all the people engaged in one form of earning a living and the education of this enormous number unrelated to their life-work! Not only unrelated in any helpful way; but in the past, the traditional method of training in the schools has actually tended to educate the children away from the soil. The illustrations in the text-books, both pictorial and otherwise, the heroes whose exploits affect the childish imagination, the description of countries by their capitals and great cities, the very "sums" that are given in the arithmetics, all tend to turn the child's heart from rural life to the city. Under normal conditions, the first kindling of childish ambition in a boy ought to be a stimulus to rise in his condition: in the case of the country boy, this stimulus presents itself in the form of an ambition to *get away from* his condition. The exodus from the country to the city cannot be arrested unless this whole tendency be changed and there must be found a new line of teaching which will fix the affection upon the soil. "Where their treasure is there will their hearts be also." If it be true that "the function of education in a democratic society is to lift the whole population to a higher level of intelligence and well-being," then the education which concerns the interests of 85 per cent of the population is of transcendent importance. My conviction is that the most urgent demand upon educational philanthropy and pedagogic genius in the South lies in the direction of relating education to the life and work of the agricultural masses.

Higher Education.—The foregoing contentions are not in antagonism to the higher education of the negro, or rather, to be exact, of the limited number who are capable of receiving and using for their own advantage and the advantage of their race the higher education. The fact that for so many years Northern philanthropy concerned itself exclusively with negro colleges in the South was unfortunate in its sectional implications; and yet we do not find it in our heart to begrudge one dollar of the millions that have been

given to negro institutions. The race must have its preachers and teachers—its leaders of thought. The higher education is necessary in order that the “lower” education suitable for the masses may be rationally planned and conducted. Those who are qualified for professional life as lawyers and physicians ought to have the opportunity for their training. It seems to me that the stoniest heart cannot withhold sympathy for the sad lot of the exceptionally gifted negro. His life, North or South, involves many painful experiences; but, for all that, no one would seek to suppress his education as a means of promoting his happiness. We cannot too often say with Dr. Curry: “Ignorance is not a remedy for anything.”

The most vivid concrete illustration of the progress of the negro in higher education was the Negro Young People’s Christian and Educational Conference at Atlanta, August 6-10, 1902. It numbered delegates from all the Southern states. On the program were M. A.’s, Ph. D.’s, D. D.’s, and bishops. There were so many D. D.’s as to remind one of Richelieu’s threat that he would make so many dukes in France that it would be equally a disgrace to be one and a disgrace not to be one. The program included all topics related to the development of the negro race. Many thousands attended. Although they filled the street cars to overflowing, crowding out the citizens, yet so admirable was the conduct of the crowds and so satisfied were the people of Atlanta with the high character and usefulness of the conference that they cheerfully submitted to the inconvenience, and the city dailies were unstinted in their praises of the conference, the speakers, and the audiences. A pessimist who doubted the progress of the negro race would have been convinced against his will by witnessing the convention and reflecting that only thirty-seven years had elapsed since these people were unlettered slaves. If I were asked to point out the high-water mark of negro progress, I should not hesitate to say that it was at this Atlanta conference, at the point where, under the general topic “What Improvements Can be Made in the Religious Worship of the Churches,” the subject of revivals was under review.

To be sure, there was no one there to agree with Dr. G. Stanley Hall that conversion is a phenomenon of adolescence; or to analyze it psychologically in connection with the subliminal consciousness, as Professor William James has recently done in his “Varieties of Religious Experience”; but while the discussion assumed the pres-

ence of the Divine element in religious life, it was frankly recognized that nervous excitement played too large a part in negro revivals and its disturbing influence was unanimously deprecated.

In the education of the negro, provision should be made for ethical teaching. The objections both from evangelical and non-religious sources to the introduction of moral training in the public schools are rapidly diminishing in intensity. This topic cannot be developed here; but the reasons why ethical education is specially needed by the negro lie on the surface of the case.

Uncle Tom's Cabins.—Three periods of the history of negro education may be expressed in terms of the title of the book which had so great an influence on the slavery issue. "Uncle Tom's Cabin" may not be read by future generations, but it will always be referred to as a great historical document. For that reason I am glad that in its pages only one cruel slaveholder is portrayed and he was not a Southern man. The period of slavery, then, may be described as Uncle Tom in His Owner's Cabin.

In the second period we see Uncle Tom without a Cabin. This period presents the era of reconstruction, when alien adventurers foisted into power on the shoulders of the black masses, played such fantastic tricks before high heaven in the name of government as the world has never witnessed since the days of Masaniello. During this period the negro was more nearly a slave of selfish and cruel masters than ever before. He was promised forty acres and a mule, but he got neither these things nor any value received; so that the era is not inaptly described as Uncle Tom without a Cabin.

The third era is that which is being ushered in under the wise leadership of Booker Washington, when the negro is becoming a home-maker, bound to the soil, a good citizen. There is no race problem as between the good citizens of the South among the whites and the good citizens of the South among the blacks. The solution then of the negro problem so far as we can see it within that immediate future which may be forecast from the past and the present, and beyond the limits of which it is idle for us to seek to penetrate, is Uncle Tom in His Own Cabin, or I should prefer to say, in his own Home.